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## AMERICAN IDEALS AMONG WOMEN

### WRITERS OF SWEDEN

In October, 1849, at the age of forty-eight, a Swedish woman novelist landed in New York "after thirteen days rocking on the sea." Never had a foreigner of any kind approached the shores of America with a more open heart or with greater intellectual sympathy. She was ready far in advance to appreciate all that our republic could offer, and understood better than many Americans the magnitude of its industrial, social, spiritual, and political possibilities. Even before landing, she secretly censured the natives who run away to go sight-seeing on other Continents, "without having in the first instance seen Niagara, or any of the natural wonders of their own country." She came "with a secret intention of breaking loose from fiction" and of "living with thinkers for other purposes," but her realizations proved even greater than her expectations. She found "in this so-called realist country" "more poetical life than people have any idea of in Europe." So she was compelled by thought and feeling to record her observations, and—in this way, Fredrika Bremer, with first-hand information, introduced American ideas and institutions into Sweden.

Swedish women have made much of American principles and institutions as ideals, and of these Fredrika Bremer is the foremost representative. Thru her voluminous *Homes of the New World; Impressions of America*, she becomes in Sweden the authority on things American for many succeeding generations, and Swedish writers begin to translate American authors. It is fortunate for us that Miss Bremer was the medium. But it was still more fortunate for Sweden, for thru this writer's clear mind and judgment America becomes the source of untold liberal principles, stated in unequivocal terms, and the inspiration and model for its woman movement. Miss Bremer was a kind of feminist before she came to America, but it was here that her ideas on the position of woman were brought to a focus, to be formulated later in *Hertha*. Her sister Charlotte writes: "After her [Fredrika's] return from America, her predominating

thought was how she might be able to secure liberty and an unrestricted sphere of activity for Swedish women." On Nov. 5, 1849, Fredrika herself writes from Brooklyn:

"I came hither to breathe a new and fresher atmosphere of life; to observe the popular life, institutions, and circumstances of a new country; to become clearer in my own mind on certain questions connected with the development of nations and people; and, in particular, to study the women and the homes of the New World, and from the threshold of the home to obtain a view of the future of humanity," . . .

A year later, Nov. 27, she makes this significant declaration from Cincinnati:

"I did not come to America to seek for a new object, but to establish a new hope. While one portion of the people of Europe, after a struggle for light and freedom, seemed to sink back again under a despotism . . . ; in that gloomy season my soul raised itself in deep faith and love toward that distant land, where the people erected the banner of freedom, declared the human right and ability to govern themselves, and on this right founded a monarchy of states—the commencement of the world's greatest governmental culture."

This gives an idea of the object of Miss Bremer's visit to America, of the breadth of her mission, and of her faith in our institutions. *The Impressions of America*, some thirteen hundred pages, form, I believe, the most impartial tribute to the United States of 1850, and to Western ideas and conditions in general, that were ever made by any foreign traveler or critic. If there is any error, it is on the idealistic side, and the frankness with which Miss Bremer records adverse criticism enhances the value of the favorable testimony. The *Impressions*, not originally intended for publication, describe with scrupulous accuracy and rare power of observation our homes, our industries, our personal characteristics, our asylums, our prisons, our churches, our popular form of government, our schools, and, in particular, our seminaries for the education of women. With naturalness and straightforwardness the Swedish feminist records her opinions, as she passes from State to State, from one settlement to another, from one denomination to another, and from one home to another within this great land. She visits the New

England poets, and the philosopher Emerson; she hears all the prominent American preachers of the time; interviews the more prominent statesmen, like Clay and Webster; and makes the acquaintance of the President and the Vice-President of the United States. And here, again, the special object of her interest is the independent American woman, whether a teacher, writer, or home-maker. Fredrika Bremer studies in great detail our flora and fauna, our geography, our history, and our literature. She quotes from Horace Mann's views on education, and from Emerson's Essays; she catches the spirit of our political stump-speeches; and she contrasts the culture of conservative New England with the cosmopolitanism of the West. As she rides across an Iowa prairie in a half-covered wagon, she feels the vastness and greatness of the future America, and, as she meditates on the colossal American pot-pourri that she had seen, it is no wonder that she pictures a Millenium in the Mississippi Valley, where the "wolf and the lamb shall sport together." The only institution of our land that seemed inconsistent with true Americanism was slavery, and Miss Bremer was profoundly grateful to live long enough to see its abolition. In some respects, she was not only American in spirit, but Pan-American, for she expressed the wish that Cuba, which she had visited, might some day, "by peaceful means," belong to the United States.

A few more extracts from the *Impressions* will suffice to illustrate the America-enthusiasm of this Swedish writer:

"I could not help thinking [after I had visited the U. S. Congress] of the representation of Sweden, and its much-talked of construction. It occurred to me that there could not be any form more suitable or more calculated to awaken national life and consciousness than one resembling this of the United States."

"It is a pure and noble joy to behold the development of the Northern States;—the whole presents a glorious spectacle. For the whole movement of the social system tends upward; it is a growth of cultivation and improvement which embraces all classes, every branch of activity, and which extends to the most remote points, and includes the most humble individual."

"The Americans seem to be particularly attracted by motive powers—by any method of expediting movement and accelerating communication."

"Emerson has a right to talk about strength and truth, because he lives for these virtues. And it will benefit the world, which is slumbering in the Church from the lack of vital Christianity, to be waked up by such fresh winds from the Himalaya of heathenism."

"The Anglo-American 'go-a-head' here [in Cuba] comes in contact with the motto of the Spanish Creole, *poco-a-poco*; and—will run it down sooner or later, that is not difficult to foresee."

"Probably that which most distinguishes the home of the New World from that of the Old is the dominant sway which is assigned in it to woman. The rule of the American man is to allow the wife to establish the laws of home."

"The educational institutions for woman are, in general, much superior to those of Europe; and perhaps the most important work which America is doing for the future of humanity consists in her treatment and education of woman. Woman's increasing value as a teacher, and the employment of her as such in public schools, even in those for boys, is a public fact which greatly delights me."

"I would present to your view those large, cheerful school-rooms which are to be met with in the public schools from Massachusetts to Wisconsin and Illinois, from New Hampshire to Ohio, where light and air obtain free access—school-rooms full of lovely children, with bright, animated eyes, and where the young teachers, daughters of New England, and the honor of New England, refined and graceful in manners and appearance, stand, at the same time, firmer to their principles than the earth's Alps and Andes on their foundations, and govern their troops of young republicans easier and better than any stern M.A. with thundering voice and ferule."

"Honor be to the noble, warm-hearted woman [Harriet Beecher Stowe], who has stood forth in our day—as no other woman in the realms of literature has yet done—for the cause of humanity and the honor of her native land, and that with a power which has won for her the whole ear of humanity. Honor

and blessing be hers! What will not that people become that can produce such daughters!"

"I met there [in America] with more than I have words to tell, of true Christian life, of the love of truth, of kindness, of minds earnest for and receptive of every thing which is great and good in humanity; while my acquaintance with some beautiful, peculiar characters will serve as a guide to my soul forever."<sup>1</sup>

Another champion of American principles is Marie Sophie Schwartz (1819–1894). This extremely prolific writer appeared in the late fifties as the sworn sponsor of liberalism in all forms. She is a novelist of the people, with thirty or more titles to her credit, and many of her novels have been translated into foreign languages. Of those which have been done into English, about a dozen in all, the majority were published in America in the early seventies. She is less known as a feminist than as an exponent of democracy in general; but as an author of *Tendenz*-novels she is undoubtedly more read today than Fredrika Bremer, tho by a different class of readers. All of her productions that are known to the writer have a definite theme of social or industrial reform. They are interesting and wholesome theses or sermons in narrative form, many of them with a fascinating plot, which extol personal initiative and integrity as against tradition and hereditary class distinction. The autocratic nobility, the austere bureaucracy, militarism in its more obnoxious aspects, religious intolerance, and all tyrannical forms of education are attacked without mercy and with extraordinary clearness and epigrammatic force.

But Mrs. Schwartz is no fanatic radicalist; she never tears down a social structure without suggesting how to build a better one in its place, and it is in her constructive work that the "land of freedom" plays a part. Her watchword is individual and industrial progress, at any cost—call it materialism if you will—for we must go forward, and on the bases of individual effort and independence. This is best carried out in the United States, which is, therefore, represented as the ideal type of the modern industrial democracy. Mrs. Schwartz would go even

<sup>1</sup> From the translation by Mary Howitt.

further than some American business men; she would never hesitate to remove an old historical landmark to make room for a manufacturing establishment, if necessary. Let everything be practical, and let there be no false sentimentality about old monuments which, after all, are only reminders of "the times of brute force."

Mrs. Schwartz's greatest contribution to the cause of sensible democracy is her simple and strong apotheosis of work. Honest labor is the best remedy for the sick soul, the panacea of all evil, and the reprobate's best opportunity for regeneration. Idleness, on the other hand, is the worst of all possible sins. Work gives the only true patent of nobility and commands universal respect. But where is labor most appreciated and rewarded? *Arbetet adlar mannen* (*Work Ennobles the Man*, 1859) answers: America!

By a convincing method, the novelist first refutes a popular conception that America is, for the most part, the land of adventurers and the refuge of questionable characters. Nor is the native American ever ready to sell his birthright for money. "Uprightness is a child of the republic" and that America is no exception is the meaning of Sophie Schwartz. Interesting is her belief that the American will not marry material wealth as an exclusively business proposition as quickly as the European who has the same chance. The efficient manager of the factory in *Work Ennobles the Man*, localized in Sweden, is a self-made American, more proud of his profession and *acquired* position than the nobleman of his *inherited* title, a moral man who honors work and character only, and is free from all traditional prejudices. He sends his orphaned protégé, the hero of the novel and the innocent victim of suspicion and persecution, to the United States for mechanical training. To be sure, he is to study under a fellow-countryman, Captain John Ericsson,<sup>2</sup> but the environment must be American; it is more propitious for an unhampered self-development, and its potentialities are infinite for a man of good parts. Of course our hero is successful in the end; makes an invention; sells his patent in

<sup>2</sup> This has an historical counterpart in the life of Alfred Nobel, the Swedish inventor and originator of the Nobel Prizes, who studied mechanical engineering in the United States under John Ericsson in 1850-54.

London, where he obtains a remunerative position; and returns to Sweden as a famous engineer. But he has had a hard road to travel, and it is only by carrying out faithfully two resolutions that he succeeds: the determination to work and, *nota bene*, to learn the English language; resolutions which have a familiar ring in our own day as essentials for Americanization. Incidentally, we are given a glimpse of the complex mass of human beings within our awe-inspiring melting-pot, and the authoress voices the modern American sentiments and realities in her advocacy of better education and better working conditions for the laboring man.

It should be noted also, that Sophie Schwartz is a student and admirer of the public institutions of charity in America, and that a splendid tribute of humanity is paid in the above-mentioned novel to the equipment and management of the Massachusetts Insane Asylum.<sup>3</sup>

Selma Lagerlöf pays tribute to a group of Americans in *Jerusalem, II*. When the Dalecarlians reach the Holy City, they settle among the Gordonists, a tolerant and sympathetic company from the United States. Nowhere, we are told, is there such a hatred between Christians as in Jerusalem, and this group of "mighty" and "irresistible" Americans is introduced by Dr. Lagerlöf as missionaries of Christian unity. It appears later that all Americans are not equally ideal, in fact, one group, in Palestine, is decidedly intolerant, but the fact remains that the specific emissaries of love to the suspicious, orthodox, and narrow-minded "Christians" of Jerusalem are Americans, led by Mr. Gordon, a lawyer from Chicago.

The salvation of the Holy Land can come only thru unity among the Christians, and the native guide Eliahu sees in the members of the American party the right instruments for producing his first, and most important, condition in the struggle against hostile forces. The Americans themselves are not conscious at first of their own superiority; they have not come with any feeling of exultation over others, or with pretensions of creating a moral and religious Utopia. They are unconscious models and masters, whose modesty and other virtues are

<sup>3</sup> Her source, for this part at least, is obviously Fredrika Bremer, who gives an analogous description of the same institution in her *Impressions of America*.



discovered by Eliahu. It is this patriotic but powerless native who, with tearful eyes, exhorts the Americans to stay and help save the land he loves. And this is the will of God, says the native. The following characterization of the Gordonists, as interpreted by Eliahu, deserves our attention:

"Eliahu had already had the opportunity to observe many kinds of people, but none like these. They were very simple in their manners, and Eliahu did not believe that they held any high office in their own land, or were held in great esteem, but still he had the greatest respect for them. To him there was something of that splendor and authority about them which comes by right to those born to rule over people. The reason for this may be attributed to the strong self-control which they exercised over themselves. They never uttered an unkind word, either to each other or to the lowest Syrian servants. They never showed discontent, never lost their temper, and endured rain and heat with the same serenity. There prevailed such a happiness and such a freshness of spirit among them that Eliahu many a time said to himself: 'Oh, would that all travelers were like these! Then it would be a pleasure to be guide.'"

We may not be astonished at this eulogy. That Miss Lagerlöf should select her champions of character, unity, and tolerance from the Western Continent may be only natural, especially when we remember Fredrika Bremer's enthusiasm over the American people and the active freedom of divine worship in this land; nevertheless, as an independent recognition of American ability and principles by a modern member of the Swedish Academy and winner of the Nobel Prize it deserves special notice. Moreover, it is a new tribute to the conquering gentleness of the best Americans.<sup>4</sup>

That the Scandinavians have always been a liberty-loving people is an axiomatic truth, recognized both at home and abroad. The French historian Montesquieu, in his epoch-making *L'Esprit des Loix* (1748), designates Scandinavia as "the fountain of European liberty (la source de la liberté de l'Eur-

<sup>4</sup>The fact that the Gordonists meet an undesirable group of their own nationality in Jerusalem is an historical incident, it seems, and is not to be construed as a fictitious creation on the part of the author or as prejudice directed against all Americans.

ope)." Sweden was the first neutral country to offer its friendship to the United States and to conclude a treaty with it, without being solicited. It is not surprising, then, that Swedish writers, in particular, should find much attractive material in the American struggle for independence. Here is a field where sympathetic hearts beat in unison, as if automatically. Bengt Lidner, a passionate contemporary, celebrated the triumph of the American cause in his poetic review *The Year 1783*, and Archbishop Wallin, the well-known master of the religious lyric in Sweden, appeared several years later with an enthusiastic tribute to the victorious "father" of the new republic. Moreover, these poetic congratulations, let it be noted, were prompted more by positive sympathy for freedom in America, than by any negative hatred of England. Dislike of Great Britain, which no doubt existed could only be secondary or incidental. This Swedish interest in American independence has survived down to our own time, and is exemplified in the work of a female novelist.

Before me lies a presentation copy of *Daggryning* by Mathilda Malling (a popular writer of considerable talent, born 1864, but whose fame has been eclipsed somewhat by the greater prominence of names like Strindberg, Heidenstam, Key, and Lagerlöf). Above the title, on the outside cover, is the form of the American eagle with outspread wings, and the inside contains a double inscription, to a well-known American in Minneapolis, "with the compliments of the author." The first inscription, in English: "To hear high talk of noble deeds" gives at once some idea of the general content, and the second, in Swedish, defines it more specifically: "This is the story of a Swedish family from our old colony Delaware, transplanted into new soil, each generation brought up and developed according to American principles."

*Daybreak*, as the author herself translates the title, first appeared in 1902 and the inscription is dated Aug. 1, 1909. As the name implies, the novel is localized at the dawn of American independence, and among the descendants of the earliest Swedish settlers. The production has no remarkable merit as a work of literary art, and the narrative is only tolerably interesting, but its chief value lies in the accurate des-

criptions of its historical background, and in the writer's sympathetic attitude toward the American Revolution. She has studied all historical sources available, both American and English, and her guiding principle has been impartiality and justice to all. She gives in a note the history of the American flag, and pictures elsewhere, with exquisite beauty, the effects upon the young native women, when they first behold the new national emblem, which signifies the unity of the Colonies. It is Mathilda Malling's pride to think that descendants of her own race did something to establish American freedom, and they, like so many others, were resolved not to "yield an inch" from what they considered right. The period of endurance and neutrality had expired, says the novelist, and by 1776 everyone was either for or against independence. We see the more conservative father, Carl Adam Hatting, who still believes that crowned monarchs are "the Lord's annointed," contrasted with his son, the hero William, who is a heart-and-soul republican and ready to sacrifice all for his country on the basis of democratic principles. There are no fanatic tirades against Great Britain in the novel, but only a gentle thrust against all who have any "irradicable inclination for monarchical institutions." All prominent American patriots are introduced into the book, at least in name; and at "Johnson Hall" the native young ladies go promenading with the "rebels," while the band plays Yankee Doodle. The authoress touches upon the native chivalry towards women, and dwells at length upon the woman's part in the war, much of which is applicable to conflicts in the twentieth century. Altho the death of the heroine is motivated, and rather poorly, on personal grounds, she would have been perfectly willing, yes, more willing, to die for patriotic motives. She is unhappily married to a Tory, loves the republican brother, and her sympathies are entirely with the American cause. However, she lives long enough to send her jewelry, all her earthly possessions at her own command, to General Washington, with a note to offer them on the altar of the new fatherland.

It remains to make brief mention of Ellen Key. While Mathilda Malling studied our Colonial geography and history, and the birth of the United States, Ellen Key, as a part of her

universal program of reform, turned simultaneously to the Western Continent to observe the position of the child and the woman in the modern, full-developed American democracy. Half a century before, a friend and countryman of Miss Bremer—she does not give his name—had called America “the promised land of women and of the child”; and since so much of the Swedish woman movement received its inspiration from America, thru Fredrika Bremer, it is self-evident that her pupil should pay considerable attention to social conditions in this land.

Miss Key has no first-hand information about our women or children, she devotes most of her attention to conditions as they obtain on the Continent, and bases most of her conclusions on European sources; but one need only glance at the list of bibliography to *Barnets århundrade* (the list is omitted in the English translation, published in New York) to realize to what extent she sought knowledge and ideas from American educators and feminists. As a thoro and broadminded student and teacher, she knew better than anyone else that there could be no comprehensive treatment of the woman problem with America left out. She studies our sociologists diligently, and is no stranger in our philosophy or belles-lettres. Certainly many of her views on the development of the child, as for instance those on corporal punishment coincide with our own, and we may well surmise some kind of influence. That Miss Key was well acquainted with the American work in the field of child psychology is definitely stated in *The Century of the Child*.

In her “retrospective glance” of the history of the woman movement, Ellen Key traces the development from “a powerful and man-indicting plea by the American women in their *Declaration of Sentiments*” in 1848. Like Fredrika Bremer, she commends the “great women agitators” of America, like Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frances Willard, and among “the fundamental types of single women,” “according to current opinion,” the person of intellect predominates in America. In a chapter on the influence of the woman’s movement on motherhood, the Swedish feminist pays this tribute to *The Luck of Roaring Camp* by Bret Harte: “The finest thing written about the child as a cultural power is written by an American.”

The much-criticized ideals of Ellen Key, many of them original with the reformer herself, can only be realized in a distant future, and some may prove too impracticable for objectification in any generation of human society. They will probably never be adopted *in toto* by any one nation without modification of method. But in the progress toward the ultimate goal, Miss Key entertains great hopes for the future of America. While rummaging around a book-shop recently, the writer came upon an inscribed copy of *Barnets århundrade*. As I looked at the inscription by the authoress, dated Oct. 1904, I saw these words, in English: "America, the cradle of the new humanity."

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